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NOAA Fisheries Monitors Injured Right Whale
Information Learned can Help Other Vessel Operators Avoid Similar Tragedy

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service is monitoring an endangered right whale that was struck by a recreational vessel on March 10 off the coast of Georgia. NOAA is an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

The 43-foot recreational vessel was traveling from Brunswick, Georgia to Hobe Sound, Florida when it struck the right whale, nearly severing the left half of its fluke. The vessel immediately notified the U.S. Coast Guard and stayed with the whale. NOAA Fisheries Service aerial crews arrived at the scene quickly and were able to observe the wounded animal for some time, documenting behavior as well as assessing the severity of the injury.

"We can't do much beyond monitoring at this point," said NOAA Fisheries marine mammal biologist Barb Zoodsma. "The injury is certainly serious, but we are hoping that this animal will survive." Whale specialists at the New England Aquarium have identified the whale as #2425, an 11-year-old female. At least one other right whale is known to have survived a similar injury.

"As happened in this case, boaters are not always able to see whales in the water despite being alert at the helm and operating in good weather," Zoodsma said. "Mariners should remain alert, but also consider either avoiding areas where right whales are known to be or keeping speeds between 10 to 14 knots when the whales are likely to be present."

The Agency recommends that until the end of March, mariners route around the area off the southeastern U.S., where right whales are most likely to be found. That means traveling east of 81° longitude between Blackbeard Island, Georgia and St. Augustine, Florida. If vessels need to transit closer to shore, the Agency recommends traveling at 10 to 14 knots.

Also, since right whales are presently migrating from the Southeast calving/wintering area to feeding habitat in the Northeast, NOAA Fisheries Service advises vessel operators from South Carolina to New York to travel at 10 to 14 knots when within 30 miles of a port entrance

The right whale found in the North Atlantic primarily occurs in coastal or shelf waters. Individuals range from winter calving and nursery areas in coastal waters off the southeastern United States to summer feeding grounds in New England waters and north to the Bay of Fundy and Scotian Shelf. Historically depleted by commercial whaling, this population of Northern right whale (*Eubalaena glacialis*) at present numbers approximately 300 individuals. Although commercial hunt was outlawed internationally in 1935, the animals are susceptible to, vessel collisions and entanglement in fishing gear, which can cause serious injuries and death. Currently, NOAA Fisheries Service conducts a multi-faceted effort to eliminate human-caused

injuries and deaths among right whales in the North Atlantic. The Agency has developed a comprehensive ship strike strategy that includes revised traffic rules for vessels in U.S. Atlantic waters when right whales are likely to be present. The Agency also supports aerial surveys to notify mariners of right whale sighting locations, and operates mandatory ship reporting systems in partnership with the U.S. Coast Guard to provide right whale locations to mariners entering right whale habitat. Since 1996, NOAA Fisheries Service has been working to eliminate the dangers posed to large whales by commercial fishing operations through a program of research, consultation with the fishing industry and whale experts, and regulatory actions.

NOAA Fisheries Service is dedicated to providing and preserving the nation's living marine resources and their habitat through scientific research, management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources.

- 30 -

On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA Fisheries: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov>

More Info: <http://www.nero.noaa.gov/whaletrp/trt/shipstrike/index.htm>